

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OSC

REPORT FROM CABINET

31 JANUARY 2024

Planning Service Performance

On 16 January 2024, Cabinet considered the minutes of the discussion and recommendation at the Communities and Place OSC meeting held on 29 November 2023 on the report which provided an overview of the performance monitoring and assurance arrangements currently in place for the Local Planning Authority function of the Council.

The following is an extract from the draft Cabinet minutes:

Cabinet was asked to consider a report from the Committee on the above (copy of report attached to the signed minutes).

The report was presented by Councillor Oliver, Chair of the Communities and Place OSC. Councillor Oliver set the context to the review which Scrutiny had undertaken, and the current challenges facing the planning service. There had been much change in the last few years.

There seemed to be a perception that enforcement was not happening as much as it should and that it was not consistent enough. However, the service had to rely on potential breaches being reported and therefore additional resource would be helpful in this area. It was suggested that the changes introduced by the Government to the way local authorities could charge for planning applications could provide additional revenue to support this.

There had been some discussion about affordable housing, and the point made that this was a joint venture with housing providers, and it was up to the Council to find the best way of ensuring that more of this type of housing was provided.

There had also been discussion around planning performance and whether the service had sufficient resource. There were challenges in recruitment and retention and it was felt that thought needed to be given to how this could be addressed, and that some additional resource was needed in this area as well as in enforcement.

Councillor Horncastle agreed that the report was excellent and represented a well balanced argument. There were issues within the planning service arising from the pandemic which had created a large backlog of applications to be dealt with by a reduced complement of staff. This backlog was now under control and more staff had been recruited so the service was almost back to full levels.

Recently the Council had agreed a new enforcement strategy. Every single enforcement enquiry had to be responded to and it had been agreed that Local Area Committees would receive some training on enforcement when agendas were quiet as it had been identified that there was a lack of knowledge on the subject. This

would allow members to respond more effectively to queries from the public and town and parish councils.

Councillor Wearmouth welcomed this and suggested it would be useful to also do this with town and parish councils. He also complimented the work done by Scrutiny on this issue, which was an excellent example of the role Scrutiny should be performing

Councillor Riddle commented that the Authority was in the top 15 in the country for receiving major planning applications and this was because business was encouraged to come to the County. Staff should be complimented for the work they did and he reminded members that the Authority had met every one of its statutory duties, and that enforcement was not a statutory duty.

The Leader echoed these comments and proposed that a Policy Conference be arranged on the planning process and enforcement, which was seconded by Councillor Wearmouth.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) *the recommendation from Scrutiny to consider investment in the enforcement team and the addition of a rolling fighting fund to support this work be accepted;*
- (b) *the recommendation from Scrutiny to also consider additional support for the Planning Department to deal with the increase in the number of planning applications and enquiries received be considered as part of the forthcoming budget process; and*
- (c) *a Policy Conference around the planning process and enforcement be set up.*

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to note Cabinet's response to the Planning Performance Report.

COUNCILLOR NICK OLIVER

CHAIRMAN